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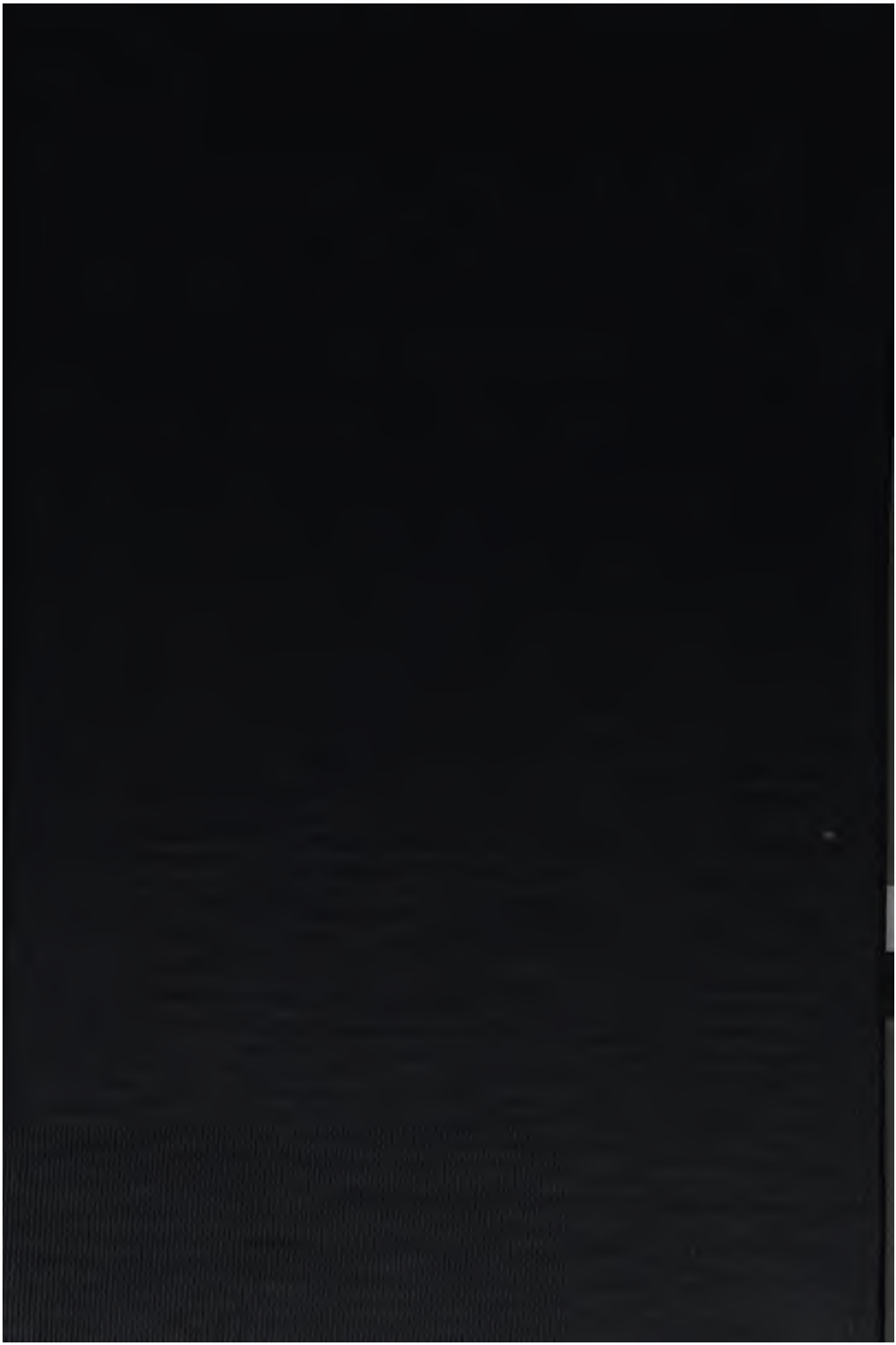

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NALA AND DAMAYANTI

With thanks for his interesting notes
Adelaide Rudolph.

January. 1908.

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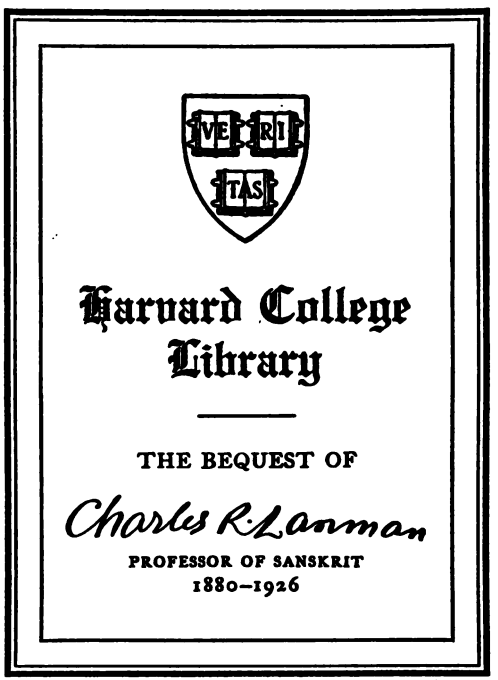
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NALA AND DAMAYANTI

NALA AND DAMAYANTI

A LOVE-TALE OF EAST INDIA

DONE OUT OF THE SANSKRIT OF THE
MAHĀBHĀRATA THE OLDEST
EPIC POEM OF INDIA

BY

ADELAIDE RUDOLPH

CANTON PENNSYLVANIA
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To Ch. R.

O Naraçrestha, to thee,
who wert the inspiration and the
promoter of my Sanskrit studies,
I devote the first fruits.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

SEVERAL years ago the writer was seized by an enthusiasm for an extensive revival, for children, of the old stories of the world.

It seemed a pity, in view of all that is demanded by this day and generation in the way of a liberal education, that time should be lost at an irresponsible age on reading of no consequence at all, either from an historical or any other point of view. Especially so, since the Aryan peoples, to whom we, as English-Teutons, are proud to belong, and, therefore, with whose history ordinarily educated persons ought to become acquainted sooner or later, can furnish from their circle of literatures entertainment as well as instruction for every period of life.

Why then did not some master of the story-telling art, some genial Chaucer, search the old books again for material, and put it into such delightful forms, that, while a youth thinks he is merely being entertained, he is undergoing the cultivating process as steadily as ever?

Might not the extensive opening up of Oriental literatures solve the problem? Certainly nothing could be better adapted to the youth-

ful fondness for tales of romantic love and adventure than these stories—selected, of course, with care—in which the Hindus held preeminence before all other Aryan races—"a people prone to fiction and admiring the marvelous," as the Abbé Dubois says of them.

Thus, once upon a time, the deed having been suited to the thought, a Sanskrit tale in poetry was transformed into English prose for children.

Though it never reached those for whom it was intended, it did find an audience—among the grown-up members of the community. And they have proved such willing listeners, that it seems better to address the story in its published form to these alone.

There are certain facts about the story, the Sanskrit language, and language in general, with which none but the specialist is likely to be familiar; and it is believed that the present reader will pardon the somewhat juvenile tone, in which they are told, in consideration of having these facts set before him with a brevity that he might not possibly encounter in a more dignified exposition.

The story of Nala and Damayanti is one that has been popular in India for many hundreds of years. In Europe and America, however, it

has not been known for much over a hundred years, except by the gypsies; and it has become so confused in their minds, since it was told them before they started for Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, that they believe Nala and Damayanti together form one name and belong to one person instead of two.

Towards the close of the eighteenth century, Sir William Jones, while in the employ of the English government in India, found this and many other stories which had been composed from time to time and carefully preserved. They were written with very strange characters in a language called the SANSKRIT. All the words of a line often appeared united; so that they could be separated with much less ease than a line-ful of English words written together without spacing, thus:

SHESAWALLTHEGODSWITHOUTSWEAT

He succeeded, however, in translating a number of these stories, and scholars all over Europe and in America have been doing likewise. But the mass is practically inexhaustible. The accumulation of original manuscripts in the British Museum alone has reached such proportions, it is said, that if the Sanskrit books yet to be translated were put in book-cases six feet high

standing side by side in a line, they would extend a mile.

The size of these books, likewise, keeps pace with their number. For example, the older of the two great Hindu epics, the Mahābhārata, from which the story of Nala is taken, contains two hundred thousand verses, which, counting twenty-five lines to a page, make a poem long enough to fill four volumes as thick as Webster's Dictionary.

Through these Sanskrit books, men have discovered within the last hundred years that the Hindus, the Greeks, the Romans, the Welsh the English,* and the majority of the people we see in America, except the Jews, the Japanese, the Chinese, the Indians, and the Negroes, once lived together and spoke the same language. Even now, if we could forget the 'brogue' which these different peoples have acquired as they journeyed from one country to another, we should perceive that the words for father, mother, brother, daughter, and many other common words, such as stand, bear, cow, etc. are the same in all these languages.

There remains to be said, that this prose ver-

*All included under the name "Aryan;" their languages all belong to the Aryan family of languages.

sion includes only the early-love and marriage scenes of the Nala-episode, as seemed best suited to the taste of the former prospective circle of readers. Otherwise, it is believed, the thought, and generally the words of the poem, have been followed very closely.

It would be pleasant if we could here assure ourselves with the same promise that the ancient poet placed at the end of his story: "They that will repeatedly recite this high history of Nala, and they that will hear it recited, will never be touched by adversity. He that listeneth to the old and excellent history, hath all his purposes crowned with success, and, without doubt obtaineth fame, ... a high position among men, and health, and joy."

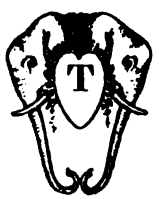
Yet, there is a virtue in it. And, doubtless, it will bring us "health and joy;" for, in the midst of the prevailing fiction, filled, as it too often is, with ignoble characters and questionable situations, 'these bright examples of masculine morality, purity, loyalty, constancy, and love' which early characterized Aryan society, and belong to our race by right, must come to us as a refreshing contemplation.

A. R.

NALA AND DAMAYANTI

NALA AND DAMAYANTI

A LOVE-TALE OF EAST INDIA



HERE was once a prince, Nala by name, brave, handsome, and endowed with all the good qualities that a prince ought to have. He could manage horses with such skill, that for no one else in all the world would they go so swiftly; and those who heralded his praises said that Nala stood at the head of princes, as Indra, at the head of the gods, and that he was like the Sun-god in his splendor. Good, too, as he was handsome, he honored the gods and ever spoke the truth. Fond of study, he knew all the songs and hymns of the Vedas, which the Aryans, his ancestors, for ages had composed and sung to their gods. All men and women loved

him because of his self-control and nobility of character. They called him 'the protector of bowmen,' and said he was like Manu himself, the great father of mankind. And this Nala was king of the Nishadhans.

Among the neighboring tribes of the Vidarbhans, there was, likewise, a very brave and noble king, called Bhima, who had everything he desired except children. For that reason he was very sorrowful, and offered many sacrifices, and engaged in much fasting and many religious ceremonies, hoping the gods would pity him and send him one son at least.

One day a 'Brahman Seer,' or wandering Hindu priest, named Damana, came to the dwelling of Bhima and asked for food and drink. Bhima and his queen, in true Oriental style, treated Damana with the greatest kindness and courtesy as long as he wished to stay with them.

So Damana felt very kindly disposed; and, when he went away, promised them a 'jewel of a girl' and three noble sons. And so it happened that Dama, Danta, and Damana, and Damayanti, the jewel of a daughter, came to gladden the house of King Bhima and his queen.

This Damayanti was famous among her father's people for her radiant beauty and her charm of manner; and when she was grown up into a beautiful young woman, she had a hundred slaves with splendid ornaments to wait upon her and a hundred friends to sit around and help her while away the time. The Hindus said she was as beantiful and perfect as the cloud-born lightning. She had those peculiar charms, which they considered so desirable, a slender waist and long eyes. 'There was none,' they said, 'among gods or Yakshas* or men, so beautiful.' Even the gods had heard of

*Sprites; airy beings.

her beauty, and were exceedingly desirous of seeing her and of standing well in her favor.

Now Damayanti had heard of Nala,—how he was called 'the man-tiger;' how he was without equal in beauty among the people of the earth; and how he seemed the god of love himself in bodily form. Indeed, her attendants were always sounding Nala's praises. Nala, in turn, in his kingdom, heard of nothing but Damayanti's beauty and graciousness. It is not strange, therefore, that each, very soon, was filled with eager longing for the other. Indeed, Nala, not being able any longer to restrain his desire to be near so beautiful and amiable a princess, went secretly into a forest near Bhima's palace, and dwelt there.

While he was wandering about one day, he came upon a flock of swans with most beautiful golden plumage.

As he caught hold of one, and thought, "What a fine dish of meat for my table to-day!" the swan, assuming a human voice, said: "You must not kill me, O King, for I will do you a favor. I will speak of you to Damayanti, so that she will never at any time love anybody but you."

Nala at once let the swan go; and she with her companions flew up and off to the city of the Vidarbhans, over which Bhima ruled.

Damayanti, at that time, was walking with her hundred friends in a pleasure-grove near the palace. When the maidens saw these golden-feathered birds flying into the grove, they ran towards them with cries of delight, each maiden selecting one for pursuit. The swan that Damayanti approached, assuming a human voice, said: "O Damayanti, there is a prince among the Nishadhans, whose name is Nala. He is as beauti-

ful as the Açvins.* Among men there is no one like him. O Fair-faced One, if you were only his wife! We have seen gods, Gandharvas,† snakes, and demons, but never a creature which was Nala's equal. You are the jewel of women; Nala is the most excellent of men. If you were to marry each other, your union would be the most distinguished in all the earth."

Damayanti, thus addressed, replied: "Say this also to Nala, O Golden-plumaged One."

The bird promised to do so, and flying back told everything to Nala.

After that, Damayanti could think of nothing but Nala. She grew pale and thin, and often was so lost in reverie that she did not hear her friends when they addressed her. Sometimes, if they used other means than their voices to

*Gods of the morning light.
†Heavenly singers.

arouse her, she would look up in a startled way like one losing her mind. She did not sleep, she did not eat; she did not rest by night or by day, but kept weeping and sighing, "alas! alas!" again and again.

Finally, her friends went with the matter to King Bhima. They announced that his daughter was ill. They had not heard what the swan had said to Damayanti, neither had the father. But he was a wise man, and began to consider that she was now old enough to marry, and that she was very, very beautiful, and must have a husband befitting her rank. So he decided to celebrate her *Swayam-vara** according to the custom of the early Hindus. At this Swayamvara, she was expected to choose for a husband from the kings and princes the one whom she liked best.

*Self-choice.

Accordingly, Bhima sent out invitations to all the kings and princes of the surrounding tribes. These, radiant with gold and jewel-bedecked garments and wreaths of many-colored flowers, came at the summons of Bhima. The earth was filled with the noise of elephants, horses, carts, and troops splendid in dress, ornaments, and garlands of fresh flowers; and Bhima, 'the great-armed,' was showing his royal guests honor in accordance with their dignity.

About this time, two demi-gods (or devarshee,* as they were called), Narada and Parvata, while returning from their wanderings on earth, as pious seers, to heaven in order to perform a pious vow, had heard of the Swayamvara. Now, as well-honored guests, they entered the

*These devarsi, when newspapers were unknown, filled an important place in the universe. They brought news to men about the affairs of the gods; and when they visited the gods; they carried the latest gossip about men.

dwelling of Indra, ruler of the gods, without question or hindrance. After the greeting prescribed by heavenly etiquette about their health 'unbroken and diseaseless' had been exchanged, Indra inquired concerning the inhabitants of the earth in words befitting the ruler of the gods, and the 'Slayer-of-Vala-and-Vritra:* "The kings, knowing justice, fighting regardless of life, who at the appointed time meet death at the edge of the sword with unaverted face—where now are they? Surely, I do not see those warrior-heroes coming as my dear guests to this imperishable world capable of granting every one of their wishes, as it does mine."

Narada, thus addressed, answered: "Hear, O Maghavan,† why you do not see the kings."

Then, while he was telling Indra

*Two demons.

†O Generous One.

about the beautiful Damayanti and her Swayamvara, Agni and the other chiefs of the gods entered, and were so greatly delighted with the story that they all said: "We will go also."

So they, too, with their wagons and troops started for Vidarbha, whither the kings were assembling.

King Nala, also, having heard of the Swayamvara, was going with undaunted spirit to prove his devotion to Damayanti.

When the gods saw Nala advancing along the road on the earth below them, and looking as beautiful as the God of Love and as radiant as the sun, they were so astonished that they stopped their chariots in mid-air. They even meditated a return to their own world, when they saw in Nala so powerful a rival. Soon, however, they thought out a better plan, and descended immediately from the 'sky-surface' to meet Nala.

"Ho, Sir! Greatest of Princes, always truthful," they said, "do us a favor. Be our messenger."

And Nala, of courteous disposition, promised to do whatever they might desire. Then making a reverent gesture, he asked: "Who are ye, Noble Beings, who wish me to be your messenger? and tell me what I shall do?"

Thus addressed by Nala, Indra replied: "Know us to be the immortal gods, taking this journey for the sake of Damayanti. I am Indra; this one is Agni, the God of Fire; that one is Varuna, Lord of the Waters; and that one there is Yama, King of Death and the Under-world. Announce to Damayanti, will you? that we are coming—that we the Protectors of the World, the gods, Indra and the rest, have a great desire to see her. Say: 'The gods, Indra, Agni, Varuna, and Yama, desire to win you. Choose, therefore, some one

of those gods for your husband.'"

When Indra had thus spoken, Nala, making a reverent gesture, said: "Do not send me, since I am going for the same purpose myself. How, indeed, can a man who feels love for a woman speak of such a thing to her for others. Excuse and forgive me, Mighty Princes."

But the gods insisted: "Do this, Nala. Give us your promise. Why will you not aid us? Go on immediately, Prince of the Nishadhans."

Then Nala said: "But how can I enter her well guarded apartment?"

Indra replied: "You shall be able."

Without further objection, Nala promised, and passed on to the dwelling of Damayanti.

There he saw the daughter of Bhima surrounded by her friends, so beautiful with her delicate limbs, fair waist, and long eyes, that she put the splendor of

the moon to shame with her radiance. And as he beheld her sweetly smiling, his love for her was increased; but he remembered his promise to the gods, and restrained himself.

As soon as the beautiful maidens saw Nala, they sprang up in a flutter from their seats, astonished, but not displeased at his presence. They were almost overpowered by his radiance, however, and dared not address him, saying to themselves: "What beauty! What loveliness! What courage is displayed in him! Perhaps he is a god, or a yaksha, or a gandharva."

But Damayanti, though astonished, greeted him, and with a beautiful smile said: "Who art thou, O thou of entirely faultless body, inspiring love in my heart? Thou art a god? I wish to know thee, and how thou camest here and wast not noticed. Truly, thou must be a king of wonderful power, be-

cause my chamber is well guarded."

Thereupon, Nala answered the daughter of Bhima: "I am known as Nala, Beautiful One, and have come here as a messenger of the gods. Indra, Agni, Varuna, and Yama desire to win you. Choose one of these, therefore, to be your lord in wedlock. For this, Good Lady, I am sent; and it was by their divine aid that I entered unnoticed and unhindered. You have heard all, Fair One. Decide as you wish."

Then Damayanti, first giving due reverence to the gods, laughed outright, and said to Nala: Show me according to thy will, O Prince, what I may do for thee, since I and whatever goods I possess are thine. Show thy affection without hesitation. The words of the swan yet burn within my heart; and, truly, for the sake of thee alone has this assembly of princes been called. If thou, O my Honor-giver, shalt reject me, loving

thee as I do, then I will resort to poison, fire, water, or the rope."

Nala replied to this saying of Damayanti: "When you may marry a god, how can you desire a human being? Let your mind be turned toward those World-creating, Noble Princes, to the dust of whose feet I am not equal. And, indeed, if you waver in your decision, you will bring me to a disgraceful death. Rescue me from that, O Faultless One. Choose a god. Think, how by wedding a god, you may wear garments untouched by dust, divinely-scented many-colored wreaths, and shining ornaments. Who would not be glad to choose the chief of divinities, the Fire-God, for a husband, who, in his might, has power to destroy the world? What woman would not choose that god for a husband, whose rod strikes such terror to the hearts of men that they are ever inclined to virtue? What

woman would not joyfully greet as her husband, the great king of all the gods, the essence of whose nature is justice, the Great-Souled One, the Demon-and-Titan-Crusher? Choose one of the gods without hesitation, if you will take the advise of a friend."

When Nala had ended, Damayanti, weeping said: "But I, with all reverence towards the gods, choose thee, O king, for my husband—I do indeed."

Then Nala, trembling, and with reverent gesture, said: "But since I have come as a messenger, Fair One, how can I have anything to say about myself? Indeed, since I have given the gods my solemn promise, and have undertaken this matter for the sake of others, how can I, at this time, tell you about my own love? If at another time my opportunity shall come, then I will speak in my own behalf. So let it be now, Good Lady."

Damayanti, smiling brightly through her tears, spoke gently to Nala: "I see a way, O Prince, by which you will be safe and not at all at fault. O Best of Men, go back to the gods, and come with them to my Swayamvara."

Thus Nala returned to the place where the gods were assembled.

When the Protectors of the World saw him entering their midst, they desired to hear what had happened just as it was. "O king," they said, "did you see the brightly-smiling Dayamanti? and what answer did she return to us? Tell us truly."

Then answered Nala: "With the magic power you gave me, I found the dwelling-place of Damayanti, and entered its large, well-guarded halls, unseen by all until I reached the apartment of her grace, the king's daughter. She and her friends saw me, and were greatly astonished; and, while you were

being described by me, O Best of the Gods, she, the fair-faced woman, beside herself for the moment, chose me. Thus the maiden said to me: 'Let the gods come with you, O Noble Man, to my Swayamvara. In their presence, I will choose you, Nala; and it will not be your fault.' So much, O very wise ones, O princes numbering three times ten, I am able to tell you just as it happened; but for the rest, it is as you will have it."

At the auspicious time of the holy lunar day, King Bhima sent a summons to the kings and princes to assemble for the Swayamvara. These, urged on by the eagerness of their love for Damayanti, were not slow in obeying. Through the arched doorway of the lofty theater, adorned with golden columns, passed these rulers of men like mighty lions entering the mountain fastnesses. Here seats of honor had been appointed for them, and to these they advanced, hav-

ing on their festal adornments of fragrant wreaths and 'bright-gem' earrings. Their arms were as strong as iron bars, and shapely and smooth as five-headed serpents; and the faces of these fair-haired kings, with their beautiful noses, eyes, brows, and gladsome expression, shone like the stars in the sky.

After they were seated, Damayanti, the fair-faced, entered the theater, stealing the eyes and the thoughts of the kings with her beauty.

Then the names of the kings were announced, and Damayanti saw five men, all looking exactly alike. Nala was one of these; but which one, she could not distinguish. Each one she looked at seemed to be King Nala. In great distress, this beautiful girl tried to recall the signs that are said to distinguish gods from men, but all the signs she had ever heard of as marking the gods did not appear to belong to these. She

looked this way and that many times, trying to think of something that would help her, but in no way could she tell which was Nala. Finally, she saw that she must appeal to the gods themselves for aid. So, giving them adoration, both with her voice and with her mind, she knelt reverently before them, and tremblingly spoke:

"As surely as Nala was chosen by me for a husband, when I heard the word of the swan, so surely, may the gods point him out to me. As surely as I am not unfaithful in word or thought, in virtue of that, let the gods show him to me. As surely as the ruler of the Nishadhans has been ordained by the gods to be my husband, so surely, may the gods point him out to me. As surely as I have desired this Swayamvara to be appointed for the winning of Nala alone, so surely, may the gods let me know him. And may the Protectors of the World, the

Mighty Lords, take their own forms, in order that I may be able to recognize my Nala, the ruler of men."

Hearing the piteous words of Damayanti uttered in this way, the gods assumed their own characteristics. She now saw them all without sweat, with unwinking eyes, with unwithered and dustless garlands; and they stood upon air without touching the ground. She recognized Nala as the only one of these, who cast a shadow, had winking eyes, withered garlands, was covered with sweat, and stood on the ground.

Then the daughter of Bhima, knowing Nala from the gods, chose him, as was right. And she, with her long eyes, being ashamed to speak before so large a company, caught hold of the border of Nala's mantle, and threw a beautiful wreath upon his shoulders. Thus she chose him to be her husband; and immediately "oh! oh!" was uttered by the

kings, and the sound of "bravo! bravo!" was heard from the astonished gods and great seers, as they praised King Nala.

And so Nala with glad heart comforted the slender-waisted Damayanti, saying: "Since thou, at this time, O Fair One, choosest me in preference to a god, know me as thy husband taking pleasure in thy command; and as long as life shall endure in my body, sweetly-smiling one, so long will I be devoted to thee—I give you my promise." Thus with reverent gesture he joyfully greeted Damayanti.

The two, now glad in their mutual love, did not forget, as they turned and saw Agni and the other gods, that without the help of these, they had not found this happiness. On the other hand, after Nala had been chosen by Damayanti, the gods felt no offense; and being well disposed, promised Nala eight gifts.

Indra gave Nala the power to see him bodily in sacrifice, and endowed him with the gait of a god when he walked. Agni, the Fire-God, gave him the power to have fire whenever he wished it, and promised him abodes in heaven as bright as his own light. Yama gave him wonderful skill in cookery, and an excellent devotion to right. Varuna, the Lord of Waters, gave him the power to have water whenever he should desire it. And all the gods together promised him two children. When they had promised these gifts, they ascended to the third heaven.

The kings, having heard that the wedding of Damayanti would shortly take place, though astonished, returned to their realms with good feelings and good wishes. After these most excellent guests had gone, Bhima, the magnanimous, rejoicing, made the wedding for Damayanti and Nala.

The marriage ceremony having taken place, Nala remained for a time at Bhima's court, passing the days most pleasantly. Finally, having been dismissed by Bhima (which is according to the Hindu notion of courtesy), he went to his own city. There the hero-king, happy and radiant as the sun, remained for a long time protecting his subjects in justice. He also worshiped the gods with horse-sacrifice, and with many other good deeds and acceptable gifts.

Moreover, in pleasant woods and pleasure-groves, Nala and Damayanti were always wandering about like gods. A son and a beautiful daughter were given to them, as the gods had promised; and thus, the ruler of men, sacrificing and wandering about, protected the earth filled with treasure.

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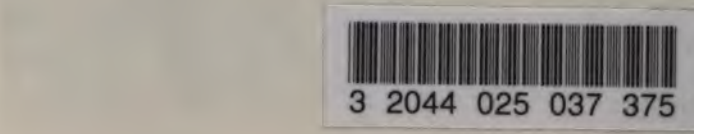

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